UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.487
1 October 1998

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Nineteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 487th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 28 September 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

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GE.98-18434 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Kuwait (CRC/C/8/Add.35; CRC/C/Q/KUW/1; written replies of the Government of Kuwait to the questions raised in the list of issues (in Arabic only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Kuwait took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. RAZZOOQI (Kuwait) said that the importance afforded by the State of Kuwait to the situation of children, who were seen as the country's future, was reflected in the numerous provisions of the Constitution relating to the protection of the family and of children. Such provisions were reinforced by laws relating to specific aspects of child protection. Working in collaboration with NGOs, the Government had established specialized centres to cater for children with special needs, such as learning difficulties or Down's syndrome. The Amir of Kuwait had voiced his country's concerns during the World Summit for Children held in New York on 20 September 1990, when Kuwait had signed the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, notwithstanding the ongoing Iraqi invasion. Kuwait was not only active at home in defending children's rights, but had also provided material, medical and educational assistance to other countries. The State of Kuwait had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 6 October 1991 and had subsequently amended national legislation in a manner consistent with the provisions of the Convention.

3. The effects of the Iraqi invasion had not been confined to the political, economic and environmental spheres, but had also had a deep psychological effect on the population, and particularly children. In response, the Government had established a number of bodies, including the Bureau of Martyrs to assist children who had lost their fathers or mothers during the Iraqi invasion, the National Committee on Family Affairs to assist the families of disappeared persons and prisoners of war, the Bureau of Social Promotion to assist those who had suffered material losses as a result of the invasion, and a centre offering psychological counselling to counteract the trauma of those events.

4. However, Kuwait could not resolve all its problems alone and, in its endeavours to protect its children, the support of other countries, and of the Committee on the Rights of the Child in particular, was required, in compliance with articles 38 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

5. Although Iraq had acceded to the Geneva Conventions and to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the fact that it continued to hold prisoners who either were still children or had been children at the time they were captured was a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. Iraq had consistently flouted the requirement of article 9, paragraph 4 of the Convention regarding the obligation to provide essential information concerning the whereabouts of family members, thereby inflicting immense

suffering on the 700 children of the 605 Kuwaiti nationals who were still missing. The majority of the victims of the landmines laid by Iraqi troops in Kuwait were children.

6. Kuwait had been the victim of an act of aggression that threatened international peace and security. It had endeavoured to counter that aggression through the channels provided by the Charter of the United Nations, leading to the adoption of Security Council resolutions 686 and 687, and through the four Geneva Conventions, in particular the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Kuwait fully acknowledged Iraq's humanitarian needs and had supported the Security Council's food-for-oil resolution (706). In return it asked only that Iraq should do the same, by releasing Kuwaiti prisoners of war. Kuwait had put the case to the General Assembly, which had adopted a resolution urging the release of prisoners of war (General Assembly resolution 52/141). It had also approached the Committee against Racial Discrimination, which had issued a recommendation to similar effect. The issue likewise fell within the mandate of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, since 113 of the missing persons in question were under 20 years of age. The Government of Kuwait would not rest until it had learned the fate of its citizens and Iraq complied with its international obligations.

7. To sum up, as expressed in Kuwait's written responses to the Committee's list of issues (submitted in Arabic only) on question 1, the Convention on the Rights of the Child had the force of law in Kuwait and could be invoked as a legal basis. Regarding question 2, Kuwait would adhere to the provisions of articles 7 and 21 in a manner conforming with Kuwaiti laws. Regarding article 7 specifically, the right of nationality was based on jus sanguinis for orphans and on jus soli for the children of unknown parents. Provision was made in accordance with article 22 for the equal treatment of all children, whose material and psychological needs had to be catered for. Regarding question 5, human rights matters were dealt with by the Parliament Committee for the Defence of Human Rights and the Human Rights Unit in the Ministry of Justice, established by ministerial decision in 1995. The latter consisted of two sections, the first dealing with complaints and reports and the second with documentation and matters relating to international human rights conventions. Regarding question 6, between 1994 and 1998, numerous mechanisms relevant to children had been reviewed and many had been expanded, including the Centre for Mothers and Children. Regarding question 8, the Kuwaiti Government accorded particular importance to publicizing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, through seminars for professional groups and other events. The latter included the annual celebration of the Day of the Arab Child, organized by the Standing Committee for Arab Children, which each year addressed a different aspect of the rights of the child.

8. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the delegation and invited members to put their questions concerning general measures of implementation.

9. Mrs. MBOI expressed the hope that the gender distribution of the delegation reflected a similar equality of responsibility for solving child-related problems.

10. The report had stated that governmental and private institutions played an important role in promoting children's rights, but had not explained how they worked together for the benefit of the child. She wished to know precisely what mechanisms and policies existed for coordination between the two categories of institution at the local, district and central levels, how implementation of the Convention was monitored, and what indicators were available. She was particularly interested in receiving data disaggregated not only by gender, but also into Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti children and other vulnerable groups, and in knowing how existing mechanisms were evaluated.

11. She wondered what role the NGOs and civil society played at all levels in the preparation of the report in order to reflect the actual situation of Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti children alike.

12. Mr. RABAH said that the report had given him a better understanding of the Kuwaiti political situation, especially the impact that the Iraqi invasion had had on the country. What he wished to know, however, was what the situation of Kuwaiti children had been prior to the invasion and its impact on them.

13. He was aware that Kuwait had been one of the first to sign the Convention, but wished to know whether it had any specific reservations other than those listed in the report in connection with articles 7 and 21, and whether the Kuwaiti authorities were fulfilling the obligation to disseminate the Convention. He wondered whether training was provided for professional groups dealing with children, such as police officers, lawyers and judges. He endorsed Mrs. Mboi's question concerning the governmental bodies and NGOs that had contributed to the preparation of the report, information that had not been supplied therein.

14. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO asked which of the precise objectives of the National Plan of Action on Children drawn up in the wake of the World Summit for Children had been attained. It would be interesting to know what the impact of the public and private institutions' dissemination of the Convention had been, whether the Convention was well known as a result, and how it had been received by children and the general public, especially the traditional sectors of society, in which children were usually more passive. No integrated view of the implementation of the Convention had emerged from the report. Most references having been drawn from the Constitution, they were not specially aimed at children, who were, after all, owners of their rights. Might it be possible to group them together in a Code specifically designed to be easily accessible to children and those working with them?

15. With regard to article 4 of the Convention, especially the issue of international cooperation, given Kuwait's economic situation, she wished to know what provisions had been made to respect a child's economic, social and cultural rights.

16. In view of the vagueness of Kuwait's reply to the written question concerning the Parliamentary Committee for the Defence of Human Rights, she sought information concerning links between the Parliament Committee and the

Human Rights Unit in the Ministry of Justice. She would also be interested to know whether the Parliament Committee received complaints from children and how such complaints, and parental reaction thereto, were addressed.

17. Mrs. SARDENBERG also welcomed the gender equality manifest in the composition of the delegation and the fact that it included persons working in the field of children's rights. She was disappointed, however, that the Government had submitted neither a core document, which would have permitted a better understanding of the country, nor a list of written replies. The report placed emphasis on the legal aspects, whereas she would have welcomed more information on the real-life situation. She congratulated Kuwait on being one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and on its ratification of five other human rights instruments, most of them in the period between 1994 and 1995. She wished to know how the work of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and that of the Unit for Children's Affairs were coordinated, and how they applied the provisions of the Convention. The report had placed the accent more on welfare and protection than on actual rights.

18. She expressed interest in the Day of the Arab Child but wondered what its impact had been since its inception in 1993 and how children had reacted to it. The report had been less than forthcoming with regard to dissemination of the Convention. She wished to know whether it been translated into languages other than Arabic so that all children could become acquainted with its principles and provisions. Integration of the various plans was essential; she therefore wished to be informed whether any links existed between the Five-Year Development Plan and the Plan of Action established following the World Summit.

19. Mrs. KARP, while associating herself with many of the previous questions, wished to reformulate some of them from a slightly different perspective. She wished to know whether foreign or stateless persons were also covered by the statistics contained in the report, lest skewed figures served to conceal disparities. Although the Convention had acquired the force of law, she would like details of specific examples of its actual invocation in the Kuwaiti courts.

20. Since the National Plan of Action pre-dated ratification of the Convention and had not been updated, she wished to know whether aspects of the Convention other than education and health would be included in it. She also endorsed the observation that the Convention's new rights-oriented philosophy had not greatly altered Kuwait's approach. The claim in the report that the fact that the delegation to the World Summit had been led by the Amir, His Highness Shaikh Jaber al-Ahmad, had helped propagate the Convention was a misrepresentation, inasmuch as Kuwait had not yet ratified the Convention.

21. She wished to know what was being done to ensure that children were the subjects of rights as well as protection and welfare, and wondered whether Kuwait had envisaged introducing the teaching of human rights in general and the Convention in particular into curricula and educational activities. Kuwait having only recently ratified the human rights instruments, it had before it the complex task of establishing a culture of human rights; she recommended that it seize the opportunity to incorporate the Convention's new

philosophy with regard to children into that culture. She wondered whether any steps had been taken to assess changes in public and traditional attitudes since ratification of the Convention, and what precise measures had been taken to acquaint the public with the Convention.

22. She asked whether there was a precise agenda for training professional groups to take a holistic view of the Convention in order to introduce not only social and cultural rights, but also civil and political rights in their daily work.

23. Mrs. MOKHUANE, while thanking the delegation for its introduction, confessed that there were several issues about which she was still unclear. First, the role of the Ministry of Education in disseminating the Convention and applying it in an educational setting. Second, specific instances of the media's role in disseminating the Convention to the public with a view to changing existing attitudes. Third, which of the many institutions involved in coordinating implementation of the Convention was the central body with overall responsibility.

24. Ms. PALME said that with Kuwait's enormous migrant population, she was eager to know how the Convention was disseminated to them and whether such children had access to all the rights enjoyed by Kuwaiti children. Were the same efforts being made to raise awareness of the Convention among men as among women? How were non-Kuwaitis made aware of the Convention and how was it applied to them?

25. The CHAIRPERSON pointed out that clarification was still awaited on a number of questions on the list of issues and on others not answered during the delegation's oral replies.

26. Mr. RAZZOOQI (Kuwait) asked whether the written replies in Arabic delivered three days previously had been received at the Secretariat.

27. The CHAIRPERSON replied that while they probably had, there would have been insufficient time for them to have been translated into English for the benefit of Committee members.

28. Mr. RAZZOOQI (Kuwait) requested a suspension of the deliberations so that his delegation could confer with a view to replying to the unanswered questions.

The meeting was suspended at 11.17 a.m. and resumed at 11.35 a.m.

29. Mrs. Nawal AL-SALLAL (Kuwait), responding to Mrs. Mboi, said that both governmental and non-governmental bodies concerned with children cooperated in the work of the Standing Committee responsible for organizing the celebration of the Day of the Arab Child. In addition, work was in progress to establish a Higher Council for Children intended to coordinate all activities regarding children and the dissemination of information on their rights. In Kuwait, the non-governmental sector was very active in all matters concerning children. No discrimination was practised against non-Kuwaiti or stateless children with regard to education, health care or leisure activities. Statistics relating to Kuwaiti citizens and foreigners in Kuwait were available and would be

submitted to the Committee in due course. Follow-up of the reports and the Committee's observations would be ensured by governmental and non-governmental bodies working on children's issues.

30. Mrs. Muna AL-SALLAL (Kuwait) said that Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis were treated alike as far as all levels of education were concerned. In that connection, a Ministerial Decree had set out in detail the categories receiving education. Both public and private educational institutions were found in Kuwait, but all were under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. There were also non-governmental bodies that assisted persons seeking education.

31. Various avenues were used to disseminate knowledge of the Convention, such as television and other media, school textbooks and the school curriculum, and teacher training. Information on the Convention was provided not only to ordinary children but also to disabled children, who were given education in schools to meet their special needs. Statistics on the teaching provided for Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti children would be provided to the Committee in due course. Education on the Convention began for children in kindergarten, where they were introduced to its principles through games and play, and continued through primary and secondary education. The Convention was available to schools in Arabic for Arabic speakers and in English for non-Arabic speakers. Further examples or action to raise awareness of the Convention would be provided to the Committee later in writing.

32. Mr. AL-ANZI (Kuwait) said in response to Mr. Rabah that the invasion of Kuwait had had a devastating effect on most children. His own children, for example, hid when they saw anyone wearing a military uniform because it frightened them so. However, the children with the most severe psychological damage were those who had been present at the arrest or murder of a parent or relative, who were currently receiving treatment at a special centre. The large numbers of arms, grenades and other offensive weapons left behind by the retreating Iraqi forces were also a cause of concern as children tended to play with those objects when they found them. Every effort was being made to collect such dangerous items. Statistics on the physical and psychological impact of the invasion on children would be provided to the Committee in due course.

33. On the question of adoption, it was recalled that Islamic countries did not practice adoption as such because of Islamic tradition with regard to names. Abandoned children or children whose parents were unknown were, after restoration to health where necessary, placed in children's homes and then fostered by families, who looked after them and from whose homes they attended school. Such children were given proper names and Kuwaiti nationality.

34. The delegation agreed that not enough was being done to provide information on children's rights and would ensure that efforts were made to improve the situation.

35. To reply to Mrs. Karp's question, it was true that the report essentially described the situation relating to Kuwaiti children, but the relevant legislation, education and health care was applicable to all children regardless of their nationality or even if they were stateless. Infant

mortality figures, for example, were virtually the same for Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti children. Kuwaitis made up approximately 35 per cent of the 1.7 million inhabitants of the country; there were 130,000 stateless persons in Kuwait and the rest were expatriates. Corporal punishment of children, whether by parents, teachers or others, had been abandoned by Kuwait in the mid-1960s. The children of migrant workers had the same rights, status before the law, and access to health care and education as Kuwaiti children.

36. Mr. RAZZOOOI (Kuwait) said that the report had been compiled through the efforts of government officials (from the Ministries of Information, Education, Social Affairs and Labour, Health and Religious Affairs) and non-governmental bodies such as the International Federation of Women's Organizations.

37. As a result of its experience Kuwait was very much aware of the importance of human rights and was trying to provide proper implementation mechanisms and raise public awareness of all human rights.

38. The Kuwaiti Parliament had a number of committees that acted as watchdogs in overseeing the work of the various ministries. They were empowered to take action, such as requesting the resignation of a minister, should they detect any improper activity or abuse of power. The Committee on Human Rights, for example, as well as keeping a watch on government activity could also receive complaints from members of the public, both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti. A number of NGOs were also active in scrutinizing government action and thus provided a further safeguard. In addition, Kuwait had a very active independent press that did not hesitate to speak its views on the subject. Kuwait had no migrant workers in the sense understood by the Convention; foreigners residing in Kuwait with or without their families all had rights guaranteed by the law.

39. The CHAIRPERSON said the Committee was still somewhat uncertain about the status of the child in Kuwaiti society and asked whether the child was seen merely as a person to be protected or whether he or she was regarded as a holder of rights, as enshrined in the Convention. The Committee would also like to know more about the nature and structure of the NGOs working for children. What sort of autonomy did they enjoy? Where did their funding come from? Did they have any input into policy-making by the Government?

40. Mrs. SARDENBERG asked what cooperation there would be between the committee organizing the Day of the Arab Child and the planned Higher Council for Children in promoting implementation of the Convention and raising awareness of the status of the child under the Convention among the general public, among children and among those working with children. She welcomed the delegation's intent to encourage further efforts to disseminate the Convention. She would appreciate a more detailed description of the demographic make-up of the country, given the unusually high proportion of non-nationals in the population. It would also be useful to know the measures being employed by the Government to ensure the Convention was being implemented for all on an equal footing.

41. On the subject of statistics, it was important not merely to have data but also to know how it was collected and whether information was gathered with respect to all disadvantaged groups. Was such data used to prepare and improve government policies and strengthen the concept of rights? She was pleased to hear that both governmental and non-governmental bodies had contributed to the preparation of the report and hoped that non-governmental organizations would continue to be encouraged to assist in work connected with the Convention. In conclusion, she asked for details of budget allocations for children.

42. Mr. RABAH said that, without wishing to enter into the religious aspects of the reservations many Islamic countries had with respect to article 7 of the Convention, some aspects of the question were in fact concerned with social issues relating to the best interests of the child. He noted that a Family Fostering Act existed for the protection of the child within the family and asked whether that form of guardianship might not, as in other Islamic countries, be considered a substitute for adoption and a measure ensuring the protection and education of children of unknown parents. Was fostering provided for non-Kuwaiti children in the same way as for Kuwaiti children? Statistics indicated that 26,000 children were under the guardianship of the relevant public authority; that was a large number for a country with a relatively small population.

43. He wondered whether Kuwait employed any measures, in addition to seminars, to increase children's understanding of their rights under the Convention. Were there any projects or courses to provide information on the subject to families and persons working with children, such as judges, teachers and others? Was such action taken by the Government alone or was some of it channelled through international organizations such as UNICEF?

44. Mrs. KARP noted that other Islamic countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon and Morocco had not considered it necessary to express a reservation with respect to article 7 of the Convention. She understood, further, that Kuwait applied the reservation in the case of the children of Kuwaiti mothers married to non-Kuwaitis. Perhaps the matter could be dealt with by Kuwait reconsidering its position on nationality.

45. She asked whether Kuwait had any plans to provide training seminars for all professionals dealing with children regardless of their area of expertise. It was important that any such training should not only focus on the wording of the articles of the Convention but also consider the underlying principles, since those principles should be considered an essential tool in their everyday work.

46. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that two of her earlier questions had remained unanswered. Since most of the legislation referred to in the report derived from the Constitution, she asked whether Kuwait might not consider bringing together all legislation relating to children into a single document to form a Children's Code. Such a text would provide a useful reference for persons working with children in Kuwait and ensure that children's rights were properly respected.

47. With regard to article 4 of the Convention, she asked whether Kuwait, in the light of its economic situation, had considered providing any assistance in the context of international cooperation to other State Parties to promote respect for the economic, social and cultural rights of their children.

48. Mrs. Nawal AL-SALLAL (Kuwait) said that the Kuwaiti authorities attached great importance to the dissemination of the Convention. Seminars had been held on its various provisions and audio-visual materials and exhibitions had been developed to that effect. Each year, one or two articles of the Convention were chosen for special discussion to ensure that they were known throughout the country.

49. Since the liberation of Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion, the Standing Committee in charge of festivities for the Day of the Arab Child had studied a special topic connected with the care and protection of children each year. In 1996, the Committee had stressed the right of children to protection against environmental pollution and in 1997 the theme had been the role of the media in children's education and training. In 1998 discussion had centred on children's rights, including the right to be informed of those rights. Children had been given the task of preparing their own television programme, in the course of which they put questions to adults and discussed their rights with them. Also in 1998, a study had been made of the right of children to leisure time and entertainment. All government agencies and institutions concerned with children were urged to take part in the festival.

50. Regarding special training for professional groups concerned with children in order to make them more aware of the Convention, she said that information courses were organized for workers in the field. The courses were free to all employed staff and were held during working hours. The Bureau of Social Services, the Centre for the Development of Human Resources and the Department of Continuing Education of Kuwait University all had staff training units, which held meetings constantly. All new workers were given information courses before they began their tasks to ensure that they were well-informed.

51. Mrs. Muna AL-SALLAL (Kuwait) said that, as part of the special training programmes for social workers and teachers, information regarding the development and special needs of children was provided during the discussion and adoption of school curricula. Teachers received training throughout their working lives under the direction of the Unit for Continuing Education of Kuwait University. The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry for Religious Affairs also concerned themselves with that ongoing training. A further example of activities designed to make children aware of the various articles of the Convention was the holding of interview programmes in schools each year to allow children to discuss particular articles. In 1995, in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the children of Kuwait had prepared an intensive programme about the rights of other children throughout the world and the suffering caused through poverty, ignorance, disease and pollution. An operetta had been written by and for children on the subject of their rights. With the help of the Social Centre, Kuwaiti children had prepared a letter, that had been sent throughout the world, calling for the release of those held in Iraq.

52. Turning to the budget for education, she said that, in 1997, the budget for the Ministry of Education had been 319,215,000 dinars. The money had been devoted to general expenditure and various humanitarian projects. The Ministry's budget was constantly expanding and statistics for 1998 showed an increase of several percentage points.

53. Mr. RAZZOOQI (Kuwait) said that precise figures for the demographic structure of Kuwait would be provided at a later date. Turning to the issue of stateless persons, he said that it posed an extremely difficult problem for the Government. Kuwaiti nationals enjoyed many social benefits, including free health care, housing and education. Before the Iraqi invasion, there had been some 220,000 workers from abroad employed in Kuwait. Currently, the figure was close to 120,000. Both Parliament and the Government were addressing the issue and it was hoped that agreement could be reached between them. Each case was studied individually. Sometimes, in order to benefit from the many advantages of Kuwaiti nationality, persons hid their identity and claimed to be stateless although in fact they possessed another national passport. It was hoped that the complicated issues involved would be dealt with satisfactorily before long.

54. The budgetary allocations for each branch of the administration concerned with children's affairs would be made available to the Committee.

55. In response to the question about Kuwait's understanding of article 7, he said that the Kuwaiti Nationality Act was based on the internationally recognized concept of jus sanguinis. The concept of jus solis was taken into account only in the case of children who were abandoned and those born of unknown parents.

56. With respect to minors, one of the main pieces of legislation in Kuwait was Act No. 3 of 1983, which took into account the legal and social status of minors and their need of protection from exploitation and abandonment and other dangers to which they might be exposed. It also took their special status into account in criminal and legal procedure. The State had created the necessary institutions to implement the Act's provisions. In the case of deprivation of liberty, due consideration was given to their psychological and educational needs, as well as their physical health, so that their living conditions were conducive to rehabilitation and their reintegration into society. Article 14 of the Act dealt with minors who, having reached the age of 15 but not yet 18, committed a crime punishable by life imprisonment. The sentence in such cases would not exceed 10 years' imprisonment.

57. In regard to adoption, Kuwait adopted the principle of kafalah, which took full account of all the rights and obligations contained in the Convention.

58. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Kuwaiti delegation to respond to questions 10 to 14 of the list of issues.

59. Mrs. Muna AL-SALLAH (Kuwait) said that, as far as respect for the views of the child in judicial proceedings was concerned, the law on criminal procedure stated that a witness had to be of sound mind and at least 14 years of age. If a person was younger than that, or had a disability which made it

impossible for him to engage in a dialogue with the court, he could not be asked to take an oath and therefore could not give evidence. However, if the court deemed it useful, a person in that position could be allowed to testify for purposes of clarification only. Sign language could be used by the court and by disabled persons and the services of interpreters could be provided.

60. Regarding complaints to the public authorities and requests for legal advice, article 45 of the Kuwaiti Constitution gave individuals the right to address the public authorities in writing by means of a signed statement. The authorities could not be addressed by groups of persons, unless the group had been recognized as a single entity in accordance with the legislation covering testimony before courts of justice. There was nothing to prevent children from receiving legal or medical counselling, where necessary. The age of consent for marriage in Kuwait was governed by the Sharia and by Act No. 51 of 1984 on civil status. There had been no change in Kuwaiti legislation regarding the minimum age for criminal responsibility or the age of marriage for girls.

61. In response to the questions concerning general principles, under articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the Convention, she said that the Constitution guaranteed the rights of girls and prohibited any discrimination against them. Article 29 of the Constitution clearly stated that all persons were equal in regard to human dignity and were also equal before the law in regard to their public rights and obligations, without distinction on grounds of sex, language, origin or religion.

62. In response to question 13 of the list of issues, concerning disparities between the different governorates in regard to access to health, education and social services, she said that services of the same quality were granted in the same way in all five governorates, all without discrimination and entirely free of charge. The schools in the various governorates covered all stages of education and health centres as well as social and family welfare services were equitably distributed among them. The concentration of such services differed according to the density of population. In the capital city, there were some 43,000 male and female pupils, whereas in the more remote regions, the number varied between 63,000 and 47,000.

63. There were 107 schools for boys or girls in the capital, covering all levels of education. In the other governorates, the number varied between 160 and 80. The figures showed that 60 per cent of all schools, catering for 68.4 per cent of all pupils and 75.4 per cent of the teaching body, were provided by the Government. Private education accounted for a smaller proportion of both schools and students.

64. In response to question 14 she said that, in all procedures concerning children, the best interest of the child was the first and foremost consideration. The authorities applied the principle of article 3 of the Convention to the protection of children in all respects. The safety and security of children in private nursery schools was closely supervised by the Department of Education and such schools were allowed to operate only once all the conditions had been inspected. Every effort was made to ensure that there was no discrimination or violence in schools, or any arbitrary action. The same stringent conditions in respect of numbers of pupils and the training of

teachers applied to private kindergartens. Older children were given a secure place to continue their activities and develop their abilities under expert supervision through the provision of after-school clubs. The clubs catered for boys aged 4 to 10 and for girls up to the age of 14. In compliance with article 12 of the Convention regarding freedom of expression, the clubs gave the children every opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings, through such activities as drawing and oral expression as well as other pursuits that called on their imagination. Competitions were organized in which the children's ability to understand their rights and defend them was tested.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.